

WOMEN'S CONSULTATION ON
CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY – CONSULTATION

- Topic: Indigenous Experiences of “One Baptism”
 Conveners: Cristina Lledo Gomez, BBI-The Australian Institute of Theological Education Margaret Mary Moore, Theology & Life Institute
 Secretary: Melicia Antonio, Anahuac University Mexico
 Treasurer: Stephanie Edwards, Boston Theological Interreligious Consortium
 Award
 Convener: Taylor Ott, KU Leuven
 Steering
 Committee: Elissa Cutter, Georgian Court University
 Annie Selak, Georgetown University
 Moderator: Stephanie Edwards, Boston Theological Interreligious Consortium
 Presenters: Zara Surratt, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
 Julia Canonico, University of Notre Dame
 Respondent: Doris Kieser, University of Alberta

This panel explored the conference theme of “One Baptism,” focusing on the experiences of Indigenous communities in North America, with a particular emphasis on communities located in the Pacific Northwest. A total of forty-nine people were in attendance for the panel session and over fifty for the presentation of the Ann O’Hara Graff Award.

The first paper was presented by Zara Surratt, a descendant of Shoshone peoples and German immigrants, who recently completed her doctorate in Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her paper, titled “Ugly Baptisms and Child Welfare: Histories of Non-Consensual Baptisms at Indigenous Boarding Schools and the Catholics who Performed Them,” retrieves Indigenous boarding school history, contrasting “ugly baptism” at the schools with the presupposition of baptism as good and beautiful. Stories told from the Indigenous point of view reveal that conversion-centric theologies were employed to usurp the role of Indigenous parents and “undermine Native experiences and interpretations.” Surratt encouraged the audience to think of how “assumptions around sacramental processes can make us miss cues of abuse, exploitation, and deception,” among which were the destruction of children’s bodies and spirits, the separation of families, and the labeling of Indigenous cultures as incompatible with Catholic tradition. In response to the disconnectedness historically promoted by the schools, Surratt proposed prioritizing Native dignity and rights in future Catholic-Indigenous encounters, specifically through listening to their perspectives on religious identity.

The second panelist was Julia Canonico, a descendant of the Lummi Nation of the Pacific Northwest, and a PhD candidate in Theology at the University of Notre Dame. Her paper, “Inculturation, Incarnation, and Indigenous Experience,” drew from her liturgical participation growing up on the Lummi Nation Indian Reservation. Through prayer steeped in the Lummi worldview, she experienced a “robust baptismal identity,” an inculturation, or the “translation of the Christian faith into the language and symbols of a local culture.” Yet inculturation is not a straightforward process, given that

elements of Lummi culture have been historically suppressed by authorities and effectively lost; in addition, many indigenous people today also have European ancestry, making them descendants of both oppressed and oppressors. Given this complexity, Canonico proposed understanding the integration of native and Catholic identity through the lives and legacies of saintly Indigenous Christians. Her two examples were Rose Prince, to whom devotion is expressed utilizing both adapted Catholic traditions and previously banned Indigenous rites, and Kateri Tekakwitha, who represents the strong bonds of spiritual ancestry: Canonico's great-great grandfather signed the first petition for her canonization, and Canonico's first cousin was the miracle case that finalized Rome's requirements. Canonico concluded that the spreading of devotion to these saints among diverse tribes and non-natives is a sign that Indigenous lives are truly "woven in the eschatological Body of Christ," sharing their spiritual ancestors with others and contributing their unique expression of the Catholic faith.

Doris Kieser from the University of Alberta then offered a response. Kieser, acknowledging herself as a non-native scholar, proposed sharing what she had learned after fifteen years of listening to Indigenous voices. The shame and confusion she experienced when recognizing the complicity of her ancestors and her Canadian church in Indigenous injury drew her attention to three ideas: identity and baptism, the connection of identity with land, and the need for truth in reconciliation.

The subsequent table conversations were given a pedagogical orientation in response to a generous grant the WCCT had received from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning. Participants were asked to share words that summarized their take-away from the panel: oft-repeated words included "ancestors, grief, listen, sorrow, heartbroken, hope." The tables then discussed how the panel would impact the content and form in which they approach their teaching, and a few tables shared their ideas with the group. A resolution was made to gather and share resources on Indigenous-inspired pedagogical methods, including dialogue, truth-telling, and historical retrieval.

After a short break, the session reconvened for the presentation of the Ann O'Hara Graff Award. This year's recipient was Christine Firer Hinze, professor of theology at Fordham University and a former president of the CTSA. Firer Hinze was recognized for her long-time mentorship of women in academia and for the current historical significance of her work in Catholic social ethics. Drs. Mari Rapela Heidt, Natalia Imperatori-Lee, and M. Shawn Copeland offered warm words of congratulations and gratitude to Firer Hinze in her capacity as a colleague, professor, advocate, and, most especially, a friend.

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